

friendship

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BY RALPH WALDO EMERSON

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THE ESSAY ON  
**FRIENDSHIP**

BY

*Ralph Waldo Emerson*



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## *FRIENDSHIP.*

*Thou foolish Hafiz! Say, do churls  
Know the worth of Oman's pearls?  
Give the gem which dims the moon  
To the noblest—or to none.*



# F R I E N D S H I P

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WE HAVE a great deal more kindness than is ever spoken. Maugre all the selfishness that chills like east winds the world, the whole human family is bathed with an element of love like a fine ether. How many persons we meet in houses, whom we scarcely speak to, whom yet we honor, & who honor us! How many we see in the street, or sit with in church, whom, though silently, we warmly rejoice to be with! Read the language of these wandering eye-beams. The heart knoweth.

The effect of the indulgence of this hu-

FRIEND- man affection is a certain cordial exhilaration. In poetry, & in common speech, the emotions of benevolence and complacency which are felt towards others, are likened to the material effects of fire; so swift, or much more swift, more active, more cheering are these fine inward irradiations. From the highest degree of passionate love, to the lowest degree of good will, they make the sweetness of life. Our intellectual and active powers increase with our affection. The scholar sits down to write, and all his years of meditation do not furnish him with one good thought or happy expression; but it is necessary to write a letter to a friend,—and forthwith, troops of gentle thoughts invest themselves, on every hand, with chosen words. See in any house where

virtue and self-respect abide, the palpitation which the approach of a stranger causes. A commended stranger is expected and announced, and an uneasiness betwixt pleasure and pain invades all the hearts of a household. His arrival almost brings fear to the good hearts that would welcome him. The house is dusted, all things fly into their places, the old coat is exchanged for the new, and they must get up a dinner if they can. Of a commended stranger, only the good report is told by others, only the good and new is heard by us. He stands to us for humanity. He is what we wish. Having imagined and invested him, we ask how we should stand related in conversation and action with such a man, and are uneasy with fear. The same idea exalts conver-

FRIEND- sation with him. We talk better than we  
SHIP are wont. We have the nimblest fancy, a  
richer memory, and our dumb devil has  
taken leave for the time. For long hours  
we can continue a series of sincere, grace-  
ful, rich communications, drawn from the  
oldest, secretest experience, so that they  
who sit by, of our own kinsfolk and ac-  
quaintance, shall feel a lively surprise at  
our unusual powers. But as soon as the  
stranger begins to intrude his partialities,  
his definitions, his defects, into the con-  
versation, it is all over. He has heard the  
first, the last and best, he will ever hear  
from us. He is no stranger now. Vulgar-  
ity, ignorance, misapprehension, are old  
acquaintances. Now, when he comes, he  
may get the order, the dress, & the din-  
ner,—but the throbbing of the heart,

and the communications of the soul, no FRIEND-  
more. SHIP



PLEASANT are these jets of affection which relume a young world for me again. Delicious is a just & firm encounter of two, in a thought, in a feeling. How beautiful, on their approach to this beating heart, the steps and forms of the gifted and the true! The moment we indulge our affections, the earth is metamorphosed: there is no winter, and no night: all tragedies, all ennuis vanish;—all duties even; nothing fills the proceeding eternity but the forms all radiant of beloved persons. Let the soul be assured that somewhere in the universe it should rejoin its friend, and it would be content and cheerful alone for a thou-

FRIEND- sand years. I awoke this morning with  
SHIP devout thanksgiving for my friends, the  
old and the new. Shall I not call God,  
the Beautiful, who daily showeth himself  
so to me in his gifts? I chide society, I  
embrace solitude, and yet I am not so  
ungrateful, as not to see the wise, the  
lovely, and the noble-minded, as from  
time to time they pass my gate. Who  
hears me, who understands me, becomes  
mine,—a possession for all time. Nor is  
nature so poor, but she gives me this joy  
several times, and thus we weave social  
threads of our own, a new web of rela-  
tions; and as many thoughts in succes-  
sion substantiate themselves, we shall by-  
and-by stand in a new world of our own  
creation, and no longer strangers and pil-  
grims in a traditionary globe. My friends




have come to me unsought. The great FRIEND-  
God gave them to me. By oldest right, SHIP  
by the divine affinity of virtue with it-  
self, I find them, or rather, not I, but  
the Deity in me and in them, both de-  
ride and cancel the thick walls of indi-  
vidual character, relation, age, sex and  
circumstance, at which he usually con-  
nives, and now makes many one. High  
thanks I owe you, excellent lovers, who  
carry out the world for me to new and  
noble depths, and enlarge the meaning  
of all my thoughts. These are not stark  
and stiffened persons, but the new-born  
poetry of God,—poetry without stop,—  
hymn, ode, and epic, poetry still flowing,  
and not yet caked in dead books with  
annotation and grammar, but Apollo and  
the Muses chanting still. Will these, too,

FRIEND- separate themselves from me again, or  
SHIP some of them? I know not, but I fear  
it not; for my relation to them is so  
pure, that we hold by simple affinity, and  
the Genius of my life being thus social,  
the same affinity will exert its energy on  
whomsoever is as noble as these men and  
women, wherever I may be.

I confess to an extreme tenderness of  
nature on this point. It is almost dan-  
gerous to me to “crush the sweet poison  
of misused wine” of the affections. A  
new person is to me always a great event,  
and hinders me from sleep. I have had  
such fine fancies lately about two or three  
persons, as have given me delicious hours;  
but the joy ends in the day: it yields no  
fruit. Thought is not born of it; my ac-  
tion is very little modified. I must feel

pride in my friend's accomplishments as FRIEND-  
if they were mine,—wild, delicate, throbbing SHIP  
property in his virtues. I feel as  
warmly when he is praised, as the lover  
when he hears applause of his engaged  
maiden. We over-estimate the conscience  
of our friend. His goodness seems better  
than our goodness, his nature finer, his  
temptations less. Every thing that is his,  
his name, his form, his dress, books, and  
instruments, fancy enhances. Our own  
thought sounds new and larger from his  
mouth.

ET the systole & diastole of the  
heart are not without their a-  
nalogy in the ebb & flow of love.  
Friendship, like the immortality  
of the soul, is too good to be believed.  
The lover, beholding his maiden, half

FRIEND- knows that she is not verily that which  
SHIP he worships; and in the golden hour of  
friendship, we are surprised with shades  
of suspicion and unbelief. We doubt that  
we bestow on our hero the virtues in  
which he shines, and afterwards worship  
the form to which we have ascribed this  
divine inhabitation. In strictness, the soul  
does not respect men as it respects itself.  
In strict science, all persons underlie the  
same condition of an infinite remote-  
ness. Shall we fear to cool our love by  
facing the fact, by mining for the meta-  
physical foundation of this Elysian tem-  
ple? Shall I not be as real as the things  
I see? If I am, I shall not fear to know  
them for what they are. Their essence is  
not less beautiful than their appearance,  
though it needs finer organs for its ap-

prehension. The root of the plant is not FRIEND-  
unsightly to science, though for chaplets SHIP  
and festoons we cut the stem short. And  
I must hazard the production of the bald  
fact amidst the pleasing reveries, though  
it should prove an Egyptian skull at our  
banquet. A man who stands united with  
his thought, conceives magnificently of  
himself. He is conscious of a universal  
success, even though bought by uniform  
particular failures. No advantages, no  
powers, no gold or force can be any  
match for him. I cannot choose but rely  
on my own poverty, more than on your  
wealth. I cannot make your conscious-  
ness tantamount to mine. Only the star  
dazzles; the planet has a faint, moon-like  
ray. I hear what you say of the admir-  
able parts and tried temper of the party

FRIEND- you praise, but I see well that for all his  
SHIP purple cloaks I shall not like him, unless  
he is at last a poor Greek like me. I cannot deny it, O friend, that the vast shadow of the Phenomenal includes thee, also, in its pied and painted immensity,—thee, also, compared with whom all else is shadow. Thou art not Being, as Truth is, as Justice is,—thou art not my soul, but a picture and effigy of that. Thou hast come to me lately, and already thou art seizing thy hat and cloak. Is it not that the soul puts forth friends, as the tree puts forth leaves, and presently, by the germination of new buds, extrudes the old leaf? The law of nature is alternation forevermore. Each electrical state superinduces the opposite. The soul environs itself with friends, that it may enter into

a grander self-acquaintance or solitude; FRIEND-  
and it goes alone, for a season, that it SHIP  
may exalt its conversation or society. This  
method betrays itself along the whole  
history of our personal relations. Ever  
the instinct of affection revives the hope  
of union with our mates, and ever the  
returning sense of insulation recalls us  
from the chase. Thus every man passes  
his life in the search after friendship, and  
if he should record his true sentiment,  
he might write a letter like this, to each  
new candidate for his love :

*DEAR FRIEND,*

*If I was sure of thee, sure  
of thy capacity, sure to match my mood  
with thine, I should never think again of  
trifles, in relation to thy comings and*



FRIEND-*goings. I am not very wise: my moods*  
SHIP *are quite attainable: and I respect thy*  
*genius: it is to me as yet unfathomed;*  
*yet dare I not presume in thee a perfect*  
*intelligence of me, and so thou art to*  
*me a delicious torment. Thine ever or*  
*never.*

Yet these uneasy pleasures and fine pains are for curiosity, and not for life. They are not to be indulged. This is to weave cobweb, and not cloth. Our friendships hurry to short and poor conclusions, because we have made them a texture of wine and dreams, instead of the tough fibre of the human heart. The laws of friendship are great, austere, and eternal, of one web with the laws of nature and of morals. But we have aimed at a swift



& petty benefit, to suck a sudden sweet- FRIEND-  
ness. We snatch at the slowest fruit in SHIP  
the whole garden of God, which many  
summers and many winters must ripen.  
We seek our friend not sacredly, but with  
an adulterate passion which would ap-  
propriate him to ourselves. In vain. We  
are armed all over with subtle antago-  
nisms, which, as soon as we meet, begin  
to play, and translate all poetry into stale  
prose. Almost all people descend to meet.  
All association must be a compromise, &  
what is worst, the very flower & aroma of  
the flower of each of the beautiful na-  
tures disappears as they approach each  
other. What a perpetual disappointment  
is actual society, even of the virtuous  
and gifted! After interviews have been  
compassed with long foresight, we must

FRIEND- be tormented presently by baffled blows  
SHIP by sudden, unseasonable apathies, by epilepsies of wit and of animal spirits, in the hey-day of friendship and thought. Our faculties do not play us true, and both parties are relieved by solitude.



FOUGHT to be equal to every relation. It makes no difference how many friends I have, and what content I can find in conversing with each, if there be one to whom I am not equal. If I have shrunk unequal from one contest, instantly the joy I find in all the rest becomes mean and cowardly. I should hate myself, if then I made my other friends my asylum.

The valiant warrior famed for fight,  
After a hundred victories, once foiled,  
Is from the book of honor razed quite,  
And all the rest forgot for which he toiled.

Our impatience is thus sharply rebuked. FRIEND-  
Bashfulness and apathy are a tough husk SHIP  
in which a delicate organization is pro-  
tected from premature ripening. It would  
be lost if it knew itself before any of  
the best souls were yet ripe enough to  
know and own it. Respect the "natur-  
langsamkeit" which hardens the ruby in  
a million years, and works in duration,  
in which Alps and Andes come and go  
as rainbows. The good spirit of our life  
has no heaven which is the price of rash-  
ness. Love, which is the essence of God,  
is not for levity, but for the total worth  
of man. Let us not have this childish  
luxury in our regards; but the austerest  
worth; let us approach our friend with  
an audacious trust in the truth of his  
heart, in the breadth, impossible to be

FRIEND- overturned, of his foundations. The at-  
SHIP tractions of this subject are not to be  
resisted, and I leave, for the time, all  
account of subordinate social benefit, to  
speak of that select and sacred relation  
which is a kind of absolute, and which  
even leaves the language of love suspi-  
cious and common, so much is this purer,  
and nothing is so much divine.

I do not wish to treat friendships daintily,  
but with roughest courage. When they  
are real, they are not glass threads of  
frost-work, but the solidest thing we  
know. For now, after so many ages of  
experience, what do we know of nature,  
or of ourselves? Not one step has man  
taken toward the solution of the problem  
of his destiny. In one condemnation of  
folly stand the whole universe of men.

But the sweet sincerity of joy and peace, FRIEND-  
which I draw from this alliance with my SHIP  
brother's soul, is the nut itself whereof  
all nature & all thought is but the husk  
and shell. Happy is the house that shel-  
ters a friend ! It might well be built, like  
a festal bower or arch, to entertain him  
a single day. Happier, if we know the  
solemnity of that relation, and honor its  
law ! It is no idle band, no holiday en-  
gagement. He who offers himself a can-  
didate for that covenant, comes up, like  
an Olympian, to the great games, where  
the first-born of the world are the com-  
petitors. He proposes himself for contests  
where Time, Want, Danger are in the  
lists, and he alone is victor who has truth  
enough in his constitution to preserve the  
delicacy of his beauty from the wear and

FRIEND- SHIP tear of all these. The gifts of fortune may be present or absent, but all the speed in that contest depends on intrinsic nobleness, and the contempt of trifles. There are two elements that go to the composition of friendship, each so sovereign that I can detect no superiority in either, no reason why either should be first named. One is Truth. A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him, I may think aloud. I am arrived at last in the presence of a man so real and equal, that I may drop even those undermost garments of dissimulation, courtesy and second thought, which men never put off, and may deal with him with the simplicity and wholeness, with which one chemical atom meets another. Sincerity is the luxury allowed, like diadems and



authority, only to the highest rank, *that* FRIEND-  
being permitted to speak truth, as having SHIP  
none above it to court or conform unto.

Every man alone is sincere. At the entrance of a second person, hypocrisy begins. We parry and fend the approach of our fellow man by compliments, by gossip, by amusements, by affairs. We cover up our thought from him under a hundred folds.



KNEW a man who, under a certain religious frenzy, cast off this drapery, and omitting all compliment and commonplace, spoke to the conscience of every person he encountered, and that with great insight and beauty. At first he was resisted, and all men agreed he was mad. But persisting, as indeed he could not help do-

FRIEND- ing, for some time in this course, he at-  
SHIP tained to the advantage of bringing every  
man of his acquaintance into true relations with him. No man would think of speaking falsely with him, or of putting him off with any chat of markets or reading-rooms. But every man was constrained by so much sincerity to face him, and what love of nature, what poetry, what symbol of truth he had, he did certainly show him. But to most of us society shows not its face and eye, but its side and back. To stand in true relations with men in a false age, is worth a fit of insanity, is it not? We can seldom go erect. Almost every man we meet requires some civility, requires to be humored;—he has some fame, some talent, some whim of religion or philanthropy



in his head that is not to be questioned, FRIEND-  
and spoils all conversation with him. But SHIP  
a friend is a sane man who exercises not  
my ingenuity but me. My friend gives  
me entertainment without requiring me  
to stoop, or to lisp, or to mask myself.  
A friend, therefore, is a sort of paradox  
in nature. I who alone am, I who see  
nothing in nature whose existence I can  
affirm with equal evidence to my own,  
behold now the semblance of my being  
in all its height, variety and curiosity, re-  
iterated in a foreign form; so that a  
friend may well be reckoned the master-  
piece of nature.

The other element of friendship is Ten-  
derness. We are holden to men by every  
sort of tie, by blood, by pride, by fear,  
by hope, by lucre, by lust, by hate, by

FRIEND- admiration, by every circumstance and  
SHIP badge and trifle, but we can scarce believe  
that so much character can subsist in another as to draw us by love. Can another be so blessed, and we so pure, that we can offer him tenderness? When a man becomes dear to me, I have touched the goal of fortune. I find very little written directly to the heart of this matter in books. And yet I have one text which I cannot choose but remember. My author says, "I offer myself faintly & bluntly to those whose I effectually am, and tender myself least to him to whom I am the most devoted." I wish that friendship should have feet, as well as eyes and eloquence. It must plant itself on the ground, before it vaults over the moon. I wish it to be a little of a citizen, before it is

quite a cherub. We chide the citizen FRIEND-  
because he makes love a commodity. It SHIP  
is an exchange of gifts, of useful loans;  
it is good neighborhood; it watches with  
the sick; it holds the pall at the funeral;  
and quite loses sight of the delicacies and  
nobility of the relation. But though we  
cannot find the god under this disguise  
of a sutler, yet, on the other hand, we  
cannot forgive the poet if he spins his  
thread too fine, and does not substantiate  
his romance by the municipal virtues of  
justice, punctuality, fidelity and pity.



HATE the prostitution of the  
name of friendship to signify  
modish and worldly alliances. I  
much prefer the company of  
plough-boys and tin-pedlars, to the silk-  
en and perfumed amity which only cel-

FRIEND- ebrates its days of encounter by a frivo-  
SHIP lous display, by rides in a curricule, and  
dinners at the best taverns. The end of  
friendship is a commerce the most strict  
and homely that can be joined; more  
strict than any of which we have expe-  
rience. It is for aid and comfort through  
all the relations and passages of life and  
death. It is fit for serene days, & graceful  
gifts, and country rambles, but also for  
rough roads and hard fare, shipwreck,  
poverty and persecution. It keeps com-  
pany with the sallies of the wit and the  
trances of religion. We are to dignify to  
each other the daily needs and offices of  
man's life, and embellish it by courage,  
wisdom and unity. It should never fall  
into something usual and settled, but  
should be alert and inventive, and add

rhyme and reason to what was drudgery. FRIEND-  
For perfect friendship it may be said to SHIP  
require natures so rare and costly, so  
well tempered each, & so happily adapt-  
ed, and withal so circumstanced, (for  
even in that particular, a poet says, love  
demands that the parties be altogether  
paired,) that very seldom can its satis-  
faction be realized. It cannot subsist in  
its perfection, say some of those who are  
learned in this warm lore of the heart,  
betwixt more than two. I am not quite  
so strict in my terms, perhaps because I  
have never known so high a fellowship  
as others. I please my imagination more  
with a circle of godlike men and women  
variously related to each other, and be-  
tween whom subsists a lofty intelligence.  
But I find this law of *one to one*, per-

FRIEND- empty for conversation, which is the  
SHIP practice and consummation of friendship.

Do not mix waters too much. The best mix as ill as good and bad. You shall have every useful and cheering discourse at several times with two several men, but let all three of you come together, and you shall not have one new & hearty word. Two may talk and one may hear, but three cannot take part in a conversation of the most sincere and searching sort. In good company there is never such discourse between two, across the table, as takes place when you leave them alone. In good company, the individuals at once merge their egotism into a social soul exactly co-extensive with the several consciousnesses there present. No partialities of friend to friend,



no fondness of brother to sister, of wife F R I E N D -  
to husband, are there pertinent, but quite S H I P  
otherwise. Only he may then speak who  
can sail on the common thought of the  
party, and not poorly limited to his own.  
Now this convention, which good sense  
demands, destroys the high freedom of  
great conversation, which requires an ab-  
solute running of two souls into one.



NO TWO men but being left alone  
with each other, enter into simpler  
relations. Yet it is affinity  
that determines *which* two shall  
converse. Unrelated men give little joy  
to each other; will never suspect the la-  
tent powers of each. We talk sometimes  
of a great talent for conversation, as if  
it were a permanent property in some  
individuals. Conversation is an evanescent

FRIEND- relation,—no more. A man is reputed to  
SHIP have thought and eloquence; he cannot,  
for all that, say a word to his cousin or  
his uncle. They accuse his silence with as  
much reason as they would blame the in-  
significance of a dial in the shade. In the  
sun it will mark the hour. Among those  
who enjoy his thought, he will regain his  
tongue.

Friendship requires that rare mean be-  
twixt likeness & unlikeness, that piques  
each with the presence of power and of  
consent in the other party. Let me be  
alone to the end of the world, rather  
than that my friend should overstep by  
a word or a look his real sympathy. I am  
equally balked by antagonism and by  
compliance. Let him not cease an instant  
to be himself. The only joy I have in his



being mine, is that the *not mine* is *mine*. FRIEND-  
It turns the stomach, it blots the day- SHIP  
light; where I looked for a manly further-  
ance, or at least a manly resistance, to  
find a mush of concession. Better be a  
nettle in the side of your friend than his  
echo. The condition which high friend-  
ship demands, is, ability to do without  
it. To be capable of that high office re-  
quires great and sublime parts. There  
must be very two, before there can be very  
one. Let it be an alliance of two large  
formidable natures, mutually beheld,  
mutually feared, before yet they recog-  
nize the deep identity which beneath  
these disparities unites them.

He only is fit for this society who is mag-  
nanimous. He must be so, to know its  
law. He must be one who is sure that

FRIEND- greatness and goodness are always econ-  
SHIP omy. He must be one who is not swift  
to intermeddle with his fortunes. Let him  
not dare to intermeddle with this. Leave  
to the diamond its ages to grow, nor ex-  
pect to accelerate the births of the eter-  
nal. Friendship demands a religious treat-  
ment. We must not be wilful, we must  
not provide. We talk of choosing our  
friends, but friends are self-elected. Rev-  
erence is a great part of it. Treat your  
friend as a spectacle. Of course, if he be  
a man, he has merits that are not yours,  
and that you cannot honor, if you must  
needs hold him close to your person.  
Stand aside. Give these merits room. Let  
them mount & expand. Be not so much  
his friend that you can never know his  
peculiar energies, like fond mammas who

shut up their boy in the house until he FRIEND-  
is almost grown a girl. Are you the friend SHIP  
of your friend's buttons, or of his thought?  
To a great heart he will still be a stranger  
in a thousand particulars, that he may  
come near in the holiest ground. Leave  
it to girls and boys to regard a friend as  
property, and to suck a short and all-  
confounding pleasure instead of the pure  
nectar of God.

Let us buy our entrance to this guild by  
a long probation. Why should we dese-  
crate noble and beautiful souls by in-  
truding on them? Why insist on rash  
personal relations with your friend? Why  
go to his house, & know his mother and  
brother and sisters? Why be visited by  
him at your own? Are these things ma-  
terial to our covenant? Leave this touch-

FRIEND- ing and clawing. Let him be to me a  
SHIP spirit. A message, a thought, a sincerity,  
a glance from him, I want, but not  
news, nor pottage. I can get politics, &  
chat, and neighborly conveniences, from  
cheaper companions.



SHOULD not the society of my  
friend be to me poetic, pure, uni-  
versal, and great as nature itself?  
Ought I to feel that our tie is  
profane in comparison with yonder bar  
of cloud that sleeps on the horizon, or  
clump of waving grass that divides the  
brook? Let us not vilify but raise it to  
that standard. That great defying eye,  
that scornful beauty of his mien and ac-  
tion, do not pique yourself on reducing,  
but rather fortify and enhance. Worship  
his superiorities. Wish him not less by a

thought, but hoard and tell them all. FRIEND-  
Guard him as thy great counterpart; SHIP  
have a principedom to thy friend. Let him  
be to thee forever a sort of beautiful  
enemy, untamable, devoutly revered, &  
not a trivial conveniency to be soon out-  
grown and cast aside. The hues of the  
opal, the light of the diamond, are not  
to be seen, if the eye is too near. To  
my friend I write a letter, and from him  
I receive a letter. That seems to you a  
little. Me it suffices. It is a spiritual gift  
worthy of him to give and of me to re-  
ceive. It profanes nobody. In these warm  
lines the heart will trust itself, as it will  
not to the tongue, and pour out the  
prophecy of a godlier existence than all  
the annals of heroism have yet made  
good.

FRIEND- Respect so far the holy laws of this fel-  
SHIP lowship as not to prejudice its perfect  
flower by your impatience for its opening. We must be our own, before we can be another's. There is at least this satisfaction in crime, according to the Latin proverb; you can speak to your accomplice on even terms. *Crimen quos inquinat, æquat*. To those whom we admire and love, at first we cannot. Yet the least defect of self-possession vitiates, in my judgment, the entire relation. There can never be deep peace between two spirits, never mutual respect until, in their dialogue, each stands for the whole world.

What is so great as friendship, let us carry with what grandeur of spirit we can. Let us be silent,—so we may hear




the whisper of the gods. Let us not in- FRIEND-  
terfere. Who set you to cast about what SHIP  
you should say to the select souls, or to  
say any thing to such? No matter how  
ingenious, no matter how graceful and  
bland. There are innumerable degrees of  
folly and wisdom, and for you to say  
ought is to be frivolous. Wait, and thy  
soul shall speak. Wait until the necessary  
and everlasting overpowers you, until  
day and night avail themselves of your  
lips. The only money of God is God.  
He pays never with any thing less or  
any thing else. The only reward of vir-  
tue, is virtue: the only way to have a  
friend, is to be one. Vain to hope to  
come nearer a man by getting into his  
house. If unlike, his soul only flees the  
faster from you, and you shall catch



FRIEND- never a true glance of his eye. We see  
SHIP the noble afar off, and they repel us;  
why should we intrude? Late—very late  
—we perceive that no arrangements, no  
introductions, no consuetudes, or habits  
of society, would be of any avail to es-  
tablish us in such relations with them as  
we desire,—but solely the uprise of na-  
ture in us to the same degree it is in  
them: then shall we meet as water with  
water: and if we should not meet them  
then, we shall not want them, for we  
are already they. In the last analysis,  
love is only the reflection of a man's  
own worthiness from other men. Men  
have sometimes exchanged names with  
their friends, as if they would signify that  
in their friend each loved his own soul.  
The higher the style we demand of

friendship, of course the less easy to es- FRIEND-  
tablish it with flesh and blood. We walk SHIP  
alone in the world. Friends, such as we  
desire, are dreams and fables.

UT a sublime hope cheers ever  
the faithful heart, that elsewhere,  
in other regions of the universal  
power, souls are now acting,  
enduring, and daring, which can love us,  
and which we can love. We may con-  
gratulate ourselves that the period of  
nonage, of follies, of blunders, and of  
shame, is passed in solitude, & when we  
are finished men, we shall grasp heroic  
hands in heroic hands. Only be admon-  
ished by what you already see, not to  
strike leagues of friendship with cheap  
persons, where no friendship can be. Our  
impatience betrays us into rash & foolish

FRIEND- alliances which no God attends. By per-  
SHIP sisting in your path, though you forfeit  
the little, you gain the great. You be-  
come pronounced. You demonstrate  
yourself, so as to put yourself out of the  
reach of false relations, and you draw to  
you the first born of the world,—those  
rare pilgrims whereof only one or two  
wander in nature at once, and before  
whom the vulgar great show as spectres  
and shadows merely.

It is foolish to be afraid of making our  
ties too spiritual, as if so we could lose  
any genuine love. Whatever correction  
of our popular views we make from in-  
sight, nature will be sure to bear us out  
in, and though it seem to rob us of some  
joy, will repay us with a greater. Let us  
feel, if we will, the absolute insinuation

of man. We are sure that we have all in FRIEND-  
us. We go to Europe, or we pursue per- SHIP  
sons, or we read books, in the instinct-  
ive faith that these will call it out and  
reveal us to ourselves. Beggars all. The  
persons are such as we; the Europe, an  
old faded garment of dead persons; the  
books, their ghosts. Let us drop this idol-  
atry. Let us give over this mendicancy.  
Let us even bid our dearest friends fare-  
well, and defy them, saying, 'Who are  
you? Unhand me: I will be dependent  
no more.' Ah! seest thou not, O brother,  
that thus we part only to meet again on  
a higher platform, & only be more each  
other's, because we are more our own?  
A friend is Janus-faced: he looks to the  
past and the future. He is the child of  
all my foregoing hours, the prophet of

FRIEND- those to come. He is the harbinger of a  
SHIP greater friend. It is the property of the  
divine to be reproductive.

I do then with my friend as I do with  
my books. I would have them where I  
can find them, but I seldom use them.  
We must have society on our own terms,  
and admit or exclude it on the slightest  
cause. I cannot afford to speak much  
with my friend. If he is great, he makes  
me so great that I cannot descend to  
converse. In the great days, presenti-  
ments hover before me, far before me in  
the firmament. I ought then to dedicate  
myself to them. I go in that I may seize  
them, I go out that I may seize them. I  
fear only that I may lose them reced-  
ing into the sky in which now they are  
only a patch of brighter light. Then,

though I prize my friends, I cannot afford to talk with them and study their visions, lest I lose my own. FRIEND-SHIP



T would indeed give me a certain household joy to quit this lofty seeking, this spiritual astronomy, or search of stars, and come down to warm sympathies with you; but then I know well I shall mourn always the vanishing of my mighty gods. It is true, next week I shall have languid times, when I can well afford to occupy myself with foreign objects; then I shall regret the lost literature of your mind, and wish you were by my side again. But if you come, perhaps you will fill my mind only with new visions, not with yourself but with your lustres, and I shall not be able any more than



FRIEND- now to converse with you. So I will owe  
SHIP to my friends this evanescent intercourse.

I will receive from them not what they have but what they are. They shall give me that which properly they cannot give me, but which radiates from them. But they shall not hold me by any relations less subtle and pure. We will meet as though we met not, and part as though we parted not.

It has seemed to me lately more possible than I knew, to carry a friendship greatly, on one side, without due correspondence on the other. Why should I cumber myself with the poor fact that the receiver is not capacious? It never troubles the sun that some of his rays fall wide and vain into ungrateful space, and only a small part on the reflecting plan-



et. Let your greatness educate the crude FRIEND-  
and cold companion. If he is unequal, SHIP  
he will presently pass away, but thou art  
enlarged by thy own shining; and no  
longer a mate for frogs and worms, dost  
soar and burn with the gods of the em-  
pyrean. It is thought a disgrace to love  
unrequited. But the great will see that  
true love cannot be unrequited. True  
love transcends instantly the unworthy  
object, and dwells and broods on the  
eternal, and when the poor, interposed  
mask crumbles, it is not sad, but feels  
rid of so much earth, and feels its inde-  
pendency the surer. The essence of friend-  
ship is entireness, a total magnanimity &  
trust. It must not surmise or provide for  
infirmity. It treats its object as a god,  
that it may deify both.

So here endeth the Essay on Friendship,  
by Ralph Waldo Emerson, as done into  
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